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ABSTRACT

A study of 188 superintendents and 379 school board members in districts with student enrollments above 25,000 sheds light on several factors affecting the working relationships between superintendents and their local boards. Board members tended to follow personal judgment rather than constituent preferences when making decisions, and received more systematic information from professional educators than from other sources. Internal policy decisions generated less conflict than external matters between superintendents and boards and were more frequently left to professional discretion. Conflict levels in general proved higher than indicated by earlier research. Variables affecting the Superintendent's control of internal policy included: board members' professional bias, bloc voting behavior, length of time in office, interaction with the community, and political experience; degrees of interest group pressure; congruence between the superintendent's position and that of the public; and the superintendent's tenure. Variables affecting the superintendent's dominance over external policy included communtiy tension, congruence between the superintendent's position and the board's, board initiation of contact with superintendents, board interaction with the community, community initiation of change in policies related to civil rights, superintendents' perceptions of limitations to their own authority, and frequency of forced cooperation between superintendents and boards to "sell" board policies to the public. (PGD)

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THE POLITICS OF SUPERINTENDENT - SCHOOL BOARD LINKAGES: A STUDY OF POWER, PARTICIPATION, AND CONTROL

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Effective public education is dependent, to an important extent, upon a good working relationship -- a partnership -- between the school board and its chief executive officer. The quality of that partnership is affected by issues of power, participation and control at the educational policy and decision making level.

"Who Governs?" is an enduring and unsettled question in the study of educational politics. The debate has been without resolution since the first public school superintendent was appointed some 150 years ago.

Initially, school boards were in control. Early superintendents were functionaries of the board, fulfilling clerical rather than chief executive roles. The influence and power of the superintendency began to evolve as school district management became more complex and as school boards increasingly came to depend upon the expertise of the professional administrator.

The argument over who governs has shifted rather dramatically over the past three decades. Prior to 1953, the prevalent viewpoint held that the educational establishment reflected the value system of the dominant social class in each community. Superintendents were seen as adjusting their thoughts and decisions according to demands of the power elites in the various communities (Boyd, 1976, p. 529).

Charters (1953) suggested that researchers focus on the effects of growth in professionalism and bureaucratization of

public education. He was concerned that professional educators were becoming increasingly more isolated from public opinion and insulated from accountability (p. 268). More recently, Zeigler and Jennings (1974) concluded that superintendents control educational decision making and school boards merely legitimate policy decisions to the community (p. 250).

Others, however, have noted an increasing politicization of the decision making process over the past ten to fifteen years. In the 1982 study of the American public school superintendent, conducted under the auspices of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the authors suggested that the issue of control remains unsettled. A major theme of their study was the increasing tensions between superintendents and school boards, possibly over the executive and policy functions (Cunningham & Hentges, 1982, p. 59).

The superintendent is seen by some as a beleaguered educator, buffeted on all sides by a kaleidoscopic array of interest groups, political pressures and functionary uncertainty. Maeroff (1974) summarized this view of a complex and conflict-laden superintendency when he wrote:

> "The American school superintendent, long the benevolent ruler whose word was law, has become the harried and embattled figure of waning authority ... superintendents have begun to view their job as an impossible one ... administrative powerlessness is becoming one of the most pervasive realities of organizational life."

The situation in the larger school districts, urban districts in particular, shows evidence of intensive erosion as superintendents and school boards face unfamiliar demands, expectations, conflicts over valued resources, and critical public

acclaim. The crisis facing urban schools as a result of changing racial and economic mix, rising costs, declining enrollments, redistribution of economic activity, and a preoccupation with citizen participation has sapped the leadership and financial capabilities of our city schools. Urban superintendents and school boards are beset by conflicting cross-currents of pressures.

In summary, school governance is grounded in a turbulent environment and has been for more than 100 years. Conflictual interaction has been typical of the executive and policy functions and serious questions have been broached in terms of the degree of representativeness both superintendents and boards exercise toward the community.

The character of superintendent-school board linkages is a matter for continuing concern among educators, school board members, superintendents, and knowledgeable citizens. The need to re-examine contemporary power relations is particularly relevant in the larger school districts. This study was intended to fulfill that need.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this inquiry was to investigate the nature of superintendent and school board interactions and linkages in school districts with student enrollments of 25,000 or more. It was necessary to develop instruments capable of identifying and cataloguing personal, situational, and contextual variables as they relate to power relations in educational governance. Emphasis was on an extensive rather than an intensive study of pertinent variables.

The objective was to determine: (1) the characteristics of superintendents who dominate the decision making process and their school boards, (2) the characteristics of boards who are dominated by their superintendents, (3) the contextual variables that allow superintendents to control, and (4) the social and political elements that enable school boards to successfully resist superintendent control.

Survey Design. Pragmatic limitations determined the choice of approach to this study. Survey research has been suggested as an appropriate tool in social science research when soliciting information about beliefs, perceptions or behavior. Time and financial resources did not permit the use of in-depth interviews or observation techniques for data collection. The use of questionnaires provided a way to get personal information from many subjects that would not have been readily available in other ways.

Although a good deal of the information needed was identical for both superintendents and their boards, specific data pertinent only to the separate samples was needed as well. Therefore, separate questionnaires were developed for both groups of respondents. Additional data was obtained from the 1982 study of The American School Superintendency, sponsored by AASA. Luvern L. Cunningham of the Ohio State University was the principal researcher; this writer was research associate and co-author of the study.

Technical assistance with the questionnaire design and validation procedures was provided by the Polimetrics Laboratory, Department of Political Science, The Ohio State University. Both

survey instruments were field-tested and revised based on that feedback.

Sampling Procedures. The selection of the sample was confounded by the lack of an accurate mailing list of all school board members nationally, either from commercial or private sources. It was not possible to identify and contact randomly selected school boards from a national sample. In order to cope with operationalization problems, two separate sub-samples were identified and included in the study. A purposive sub-sample of 15 superintendents and their respective 146 board members was the central focus of the study. The sample was selected based on four criteria:

1. The superintendents had participated in the 1982 AASA Study of The American School Superintendent.

2. The superintendents were serving in districts with 25,000 or more students.

3. The superintendents had indicated, in response to a preliminary letter of inquiry, their willingness to participate in the study and to provide this researcher with the names and addresses of each individual board member.

4. The superintendents were selected based on a general geographical distribution across the United States. All regions of the country were represented although the preponderance of participants were in the Southeast, the Great Lakes states, and the Plains.

Because of the inherent statistical limitations of a sample size of 15 superintendents, any attempt to generalize the findings to all districts with 25,000 or more students would be

suspect at best. Therefore, a separate sub-sample consistency of 161 board presidents or chairpersons and their respective superintendents was developed from a commercially-available mailing list. This second sub-sample was studied in the interest of either (a) determining that the data obtained from the purposive sample were generalizable to the larger population, or (b) providing an indication of how the sample differed from the population.

The total sample included 188 school superintendents and 379 members of the respective school boards. All of the school districts in the United States with student enrollments of 25,000 or more were included.

Statistical Treatment. The data gathered were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequency counts, cross tabulations and distribution analyses were calculated. Attention focused on identifying and explaining variances and similarities between and among school boards and superintendents. The intent was to provide heuristic insights.

Generalizability of the Purposive Sample. Generalizability is an important characteristic if the goal is to develop general understanding of a phenomenon rather than an explanation of limited or individual events (Babbie, 1973, pp. 15-18). Fifty-seven variables were selected from a total of 127 variables for analysis of differences between the two sub-samples. The items selected for comparison were believed to be the most important in terms of their potential impact on superintendent and school board interaction.

Only four of the 57 variables tested indicated statistically significant differences. The magnitude of that variation was relatively unimportant since none of the correlations exceeded the .2 level, a level that Weisberg & Barnen suggested as being too small to be emphasized (1977, p. 154). Therefore, it was concluded that the purposive sample of 15 superintendents and their 146 school board members was a reasonable representation of the universe. The findings of the study were generalizable to school districts with 25,000 or more students enrolled.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Flowing from the objectives of the study were a series of research questions which provide the framework for this presentation. Today, I would like to address five issues:

1. School board role orientations.
2. Superintendent-school board conflict.
3. Extent of superintendent dominance or control.
4. Variables that impact on control over internal policy issues.
5. Variables that impact on control over external policy issues.

1. How do school board members define their responsibilities with respect to the superintendent and the public?

Role orientations. Responsiveness of policy makers to their constituents is assumed to be the cornerstone of the fiduciary relationship under political theory (Jennings, 1975, p. 235). The ways in which school board members attempt to

represent the citizens of the school district reflect the board member's individual perception of the appropriate representational role. Adherence to a delegate role orientation obligates the board member to respond to the preferences of the citizenry, to vote based on what the public wants regardless of the personal view of the board member. A trustee role orientation emphasizes the ability of the board member to attend to the needs of the citizenry by using personal judgement and conscience in the decision process, regardless of the preferences of the constituents.

According to the findings of this study, school board members appear to be immunized against any requisite to respond to the preferences of the citizenry. They believe they were elected to exercize their own best judgment and they perceive themselves as better informed than the general public on policy issues. Although board members overwhelmingly (67.5%) state a personal preference for a combination or blending of delegate and trustee roles depending upon the particular situation, in reality they are more inclined to a trustee orientation. The preponderance of political science literature is in keeping with this finding (Lineberry & Sharkansky, 1978, p. 190).

Sources of information. Processors of information wield tremendous power and influence in defining issues, controlling the flow of information to the board, and establishing the formal agenda (Cobb & Elder, 1977, pp. 85-93). Information control permits substantial influence over the policy development process. If policy makers are to be responsive to their

constituents, there must be opportunity for systematic input from the community. Such is not the case in educational governance.

Board members reflect an organizational bias in terms of information sources. Most of the information used by the board for decision making purposes comes from the professional staff, with the exception of that received from parents. Therefore, attempts at persuasion by the educational bureaucracy, whether overt or covert, would not be unexpected and such efforts may not represent the preferences of the community. Furthermore, board members reported that the most useful source of information about the attitudes and preferences of their constituents are their own personal observations. More than one board member of every ten also voiced frustration with trying to know what the public really wants. The fact that communities are often seen as critical of board decisions suggests that the various constituencies do not see their representatives responding favorably to public input.

2. To what degree is there conflict between school boards and superintendents?

The extent of disagreement between the board and the superintendent was analyzed separately for internal and external policy issues in order to determine what differences, if any, might exist as the result of varying policy issues.

Internal policy issues involve matters generally perceived to have consequences which are, for the most part, confined to the school system itself, at least for the near future. Examples of internal policy issues are the educational program

and personnel policies. The technical expertise of the superintendent was estimated to be greatest in these matters.

External policy issues have the potential for immediate, visible and tangible effects on the ecology of the community as well as on the school system itself. Examples of external policy issues are fiscal issues; school closings or facility construction; desegregation, busing, or civil rights issues; and, superintendent-school board roles. Public opinion is seen as carrying at least as much weight in these policy issues, if not more so, than the technical expertise of the superintendent and school board authority is likely to be asserted.

It is apparent, from the reports of superintendents and board members, that there is disagreement between the legislative bodies and their chief executives over internal and external policy issues, but that disagreement is quite limited in intensity. The most intense opposition arises over external policy issues, particularly regarding school closings or facility construction.

Generally speaking, internal policy issues generate lower levels of conflict between the board and superintendent. The least opposition is experienced over educational policy issues, an area where the technical expertise of the superintendent apparently prevails.

Although the levels of school board opposition to the superintendent are not overwhelming, the conflict is considerably higher than that observed 15 years ago in the research of

Zeigler and Jennings (1974, p. 163). The increased politicization of American education during the past decade may be reflected in these findings. Furthermore, Zeigler and Jennings only measured opposition to educational policies, an internal issue over which the superintendent's technical expertise would be expected to predominate.

3. To what degree do superintendents dominate the decision making process?

The measure of school board opposition to the superintendent over various policy issues does not accurately measure who is in control of the decision making process. Knowing that little conflict exists may be no more than an indication of conflict avoidance or non-decisions. The issue that must be addressed in order to determine who controls is the degree to which the superintendent is likely to dominate decisions when there is disagreement between the board and the superintendent. A subjective measure of superintendent dominance was borrowed from the research of Zeigler and Jennings (1974, p. 164). Board members were asked: "If the superintendent wanted major policy changes in any of the following areas and the board initially disagreed with the change, how likely is it that the board would eventually approve the change anyway?"

Degree to which superintendents dominate. To say that superintendents and their professional staffs govern public schools is an over-simplification. To assert that school boards control the decision making process is erroneous.

There is strong support, based on the individual responses of board members, for the view that superintendents

dominate the decision making process. However, as individuals, school board members are without formal power. Only the board in its entirety and acting in formal session possesses legal policy-making power. Therefore, board-level estimates of superintendent control are a more reliable indicator of power. Three-fifths (60%) of the school boards in the study estimated superintendent control over internal policy issues and slightly more than one-fourth (26.6%) estimated superintendent control over external policy issues. All superintendents who controlled external policy issues also dominated the internal decision process.

School boards appear to allow the superintendent's initiatives to dominate when internal policy issues are involved. The technical expertise of the superintendent is eminent when the consequences of the decision are mostly routine and confined to the internal school system. Even under such norms, however, two-fifths of the superintendents did not control the decision process.

When conflicts involve strategic issues which have the potential for visible and tangible effects on the community as well as on the school system, school board authority is likely to be asserted and superintendent control successfully resisted. The policy area most commonly dominated by superintendents is educational policies followed, in order, by personnel policies, board-superintendent roles, school closings or construction issues, fiscal matters, and desegregation or civil rights policies.

A re-analysis of Zeigler and Jennings' data supports

the conclusion drawn from the present study (1974, p. 165). When aggregated to the board level, their findings indicate that 52 percent of the boards in their study estimated superintendent control over the educational program. That is a variance of only 1.3 percent from the findings of the present study.

The operationalization of the measure of superintendent control developed by Zeigler & Jennings was tainted by limiting the measurement to control over educational policies only. Their study built in a bias towards the power of the superintendent as a technical expert. They underestimated the influence of public and community forces in school district decision making. Their error was one of invalid generalization.

4. What are the social, political, and contextual variables that contribute to superintendent dominance over school boards regarding internal policy decisions? What variables enable school boards to resist successfully that dominance?

A number of variables were identified as impacting on the extent to which superintendents were able to control decisions about internal policy issues. An effort was then made to analyze the relationship between the dependent variable, control of internal policy issues, and the independent or predictor variables. Multiple stepwise regression was selected as the descriptive tool to evaluate the contribution of the independent variables on the likelihood of superintendent control by controlling for other confounding factors.

Twenty-six variables from the school board data and 22 variables from the superintendent data were entered into the stepwise regression equation. The independent variables were selected as the result of statistical data and subjective reasoning. Statistical tests of significance had identified 14 of the 26 board variables as being related to superintendent control. The remaining 12 variables selected, although not statistically significant at the .95 level of significance, approached that level or were seen intuitively as potentiating the superintendent's degree of control. The variables from the superintendent's data were selected in a similar manner. Fifteen of the variables were related in a statistically significant manner to the degree of control the superintendent exerted and seven were selected because they approached the .95 level of significance or because they were perceived in the professional literature as impacting on the control issue. The variables entered into the regression equation are listed in Table 1 (see next page).

TABLE 1

INTERNAL POLICY PREDICTORS

School Board Variables	Superintendent Variables
Political orientation	Board electedbywards/at-large
Appointed/elected positions	Degree of competition in last election
Years as a board member	Number of board incumbents defeated
Advocacy for change in first campaign	Superintendent left involuntarily during last 3 years
Past political activity	Hours per month spent communicating with board members
Present political activity	Years in the present job
Extent of bloc voting by board	Number of superintendencies held
Time spent with other board members	Agenda control
Superintendent's responsiveness to board desires	Central office as source of information to the board
Policy development leadership	Special interest groups as sources of information
Board orientation methods	Local power groups as sources of information
Agenda control	Superintendent concern over unpopular decisions
Superintendent as a business manager	Superintendent influence over civil rights groups
Superintendent uses discretion in implementing policy	Superintendent influence over financial organizations and banks
Board has no authority as individuals	Frequency of the board taking unpopular stands
Superintendent should stick to the "letter-of-the-law"	
Superintendent as an instructional leader	
Most difficult problems for boards	
Community groups seek board support	Community attempts to change personnel or personal policies
Extent of community criticism	Superintendent's perception of board roles
Community tension over board policies	Membership in fraternal organizations
Willingness of community to participate in decisions	Willingness to take unpopular position
Responsiveness to the community	Willingness to risk unpopular changes
Superintendent's willingness to risk unpopular changes	
Membership in various community organizations	

Of the social, political, and contextual variables identified, five are the best predictors of superintendent control and six are related directly to the likelihood that the school board will overcome the dominance of the superintendent.

Synopsis of variables contributing to superintendent dominance. Superintendents are most likely to dominate the decision-making process involving internal policy issues when their school boards exhibit a professional bias. That is, the board members differentiate between legislative/policy-making and administrative functions and refrain from meddling in administrative affairs. They accept the fact that their formal power resides in the boards as an entity and, as individuals, they have no formal authority to give directions to the superintendent and his/her staff (first predictor variable). These policy makers tend to see the superintendent more as an instructional leader than as a business manager. The more congruent these role expectations are, the easier it is for the superintendent to dominate internal policy decisions.

Intra-board cohesion results in school boards successfully resisting the potential dominance of their chief executive. On the other hand, the more factionalized the board is and the more frequently it engages in bloc voting (second predictor variable), the greater the probability that the superintendent will dominate the policy decision process. That finding is contrary to generally espoused beliefs (see McCarty and Ramsey, 1971, pp. 25, 77, 150, 161; Zeigler & Jennings, 1974, pp. 197-8).

The notion here is that factional boards exist in a confrontational atmosphere and reflect conflict and heterogeneity at the community level. Decisions attempted in a highly political environment fail to materialize due to the ideologically divided board. Out of a sense of frustration, if for no other reason, board members turn to their chief executive for advice and leadership. The power resource of the technical expert is enhanced in the absence of intra-board cohesion and the superintendent's initiatives dominate. That line of reasoning is substantiated by another finding in the study that internal board conflicts are a greater problem for board members in districts where the superintendent controls.

Various solidary and special interest groups seek board member support for their position or request. Attempts at persuasion are most frequently from highly politicized organizations or groups. Surprisingly, the more pressure board members experience from various interest groups, the greater is their acquiescence to dominance by their chief executive (third predictor variable). The reason for this phenomenon may be that the pressures from these various groups create irresolvable dilemmas which cause factionalism on the board. Factionalism results in an inability by the board to reach a consensus and bloc voting is the inevitable result.

Groups that engage in efforts to formally influence board decisions are not necessarily the same groups that serve as important sources of information to the board members. The most important sources of information to board members were found to be parents, central office staff, the superintendent,

and other employees. Little significance is usually given to special interest groups. The importance and impact of the professional staff as providers of information and influences on policy development should not be viewed lightly.

Board members who have served for longer periods are more inclined to allow the superintendent to control internal decisions (fourth predictor variable). It would appear that, over time, a trust relationship builds between the board and its chief executive and a certain stability develops. Increasingly the board turns to the superintendent for leadership and policy initiation.

Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) postulated that a school board develops a certain stability between itself, the community and the superintendent when the board membership remains constant. Over time, a consensual pattern of decision making evolves which is a relatively closed system. The board increasingly looks to the superintendent for leadership and policy initiation. The power of the superintendent is multiplied based on the technical expert concept and the chief executive emerges as the dominant decision maker (p. 86).

In the present study it was found that policy development is more consensual in districts where the superintendent exerts control over internal policies with the board and the superintendent sharing the responsibility. Policy development is, to a much greater extent, in the hands of the school board when the superintendent does not control internal policy decisions; the superintendent is seen more as an implementer of policies. Even under conditions of no control, however, the superintendent

is actively involved in the development of policies.

In a related finding, it was determined that superintendents who are careful to avoid taking stands that the majority of the public disagreed with are more apt to control the decision process (fifth predictor variable). It would appear that the superintendent is permitted decision-making discretion as long as the chief executive conforms with established norms and procedures. It has been said that a leader is one who is only a few steps ahead of the parade. If you get too far out in front, you lose the parade behind you and you march alone.

The five predictor variables of superintendent dominance discussed above can best be summarized in terms of congruence of expectations, shared understandings, and trust relationships. The school board which shares professional expectations with the superintendent and which has developed a trust that the chief executive will operate within established norms will permit the superintendent to dominate internal policy issues. Finally, under similar norms, the board will turn to the superintendent's policy initiatives when intra-board cohesion is lacking and factionalism prevents a consensual approach to policy development.

Synopsis of variables enabling school boards to resist superintendent dominance. Community-derived forces are an important consideration in the ability or willingness of the school board to challenge and to successfully overcome the superintendent's proclivity to dominate. Board influence with and by community groups helps to mitigate the superintendent's

influence. Interaction between board members and community representatives of business and industry is the single best predictor of school board control and the ability to successfully resist superintendent dominance (first predictor variable). Community elites often are members of the business and industry sector and exert considerable influence. Boards which coalesce with such groups build potential power resources sufficient to counterbalance the initiatives of their superintendents.

Educational governance has become increasingly politicized over the past several decades. Previous involvement in political activities on the part of board members contributes to a predisposition on the part of school boards to resist superintendent dominance (second predictor variable). Streetwise political savy appears to strengthen the representative function of the board member as espoused by traditional democratic theory.

Reference has been made in this report to the importance of information processing and control in the struggle for influence. When information used for policy decisions is insulated from outside influences, the professional staff controls the definition of alternatives and is able to maximize routine administrative control over decision making. Conversely, when the local power structure within the community occupies a powerful gatekeeping position and is an important source of information to the school board for decision making purposes, the superintendent's influence is lessened and the board is able to resist dominance by the chief executive (third predictor variable). Community power to influence decisions

lies in the use of power resources. Perhaps no resource is more powerful than the control and use of information.

Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) challenged the myth of apolitical school governance and argued rather convincingly that, " ... politics of local school district elections lies at the heart of policy making in public education at the local level" (p. 1). Political scientists have argued that leaders can only be controlled in an aura of political competition (Zeigler & Jennings, 1974, p. 246). The argument is substantiated by the findings of the present study. Spirited levels of competition for board memberships (fourth predictor variable), incumbent defeat in the most recent election (fifth predictor variable), and involuntary turnover by the superintendent within the past three years (sixth predictor variable) are political processes that ameliorate the superintendent's power resources.

All six predictors of school board supremacy are grounded in community-school board interaction variables. When various constituencies perceive the decision makers as isolated from the community, the community, or a segment thereof, sets about the process of reasserting itself. The politicization process assures the board of the ability to resist dominance by the superintendent unless factionalism within the community is reflected in a lack of intra-board cohesion. Under such a scenario, as has been argued, the superintendent's base of influence will be magnified and the initiatives of the chief executive will prevail.

5. What are the social, political, and contextual variables

that contribute to superintendent dominance over school boards regarding external policy issues? What variables enable school boards to successfully resist that dominance? To what extent does community-school board interaction affect dominance?

External policy issues were controlled by only one-fourth (26.6 percent) of the superintendents in the study, certainly not verification for the popular view of school boards as rubber stamps merely legitimizing the initiatives of the superintendent. External policy matters have immediate and tangible effects on the ecology of the community as well as on the school system itself. Therefore, public opinion should be a powerful persuader which would effectively counterbalance the technical expertise of the professional executive. It is important to remember that all superintendents who exercised control over external policy issues also exercised control over internal policy issues as well.

An effort was made to determine the potential value of a number of variables identified in the study in terms of their usefulness for predicting superintendent dominance over the external policy decision making process. Forty-three variables were subjected to a series of seven multiple stepwise regressions. Thirty-four of the variables were selected from the school board data and nine variables were from the responses of the superintendents. The variables were selected according to the following criteria: 1) the magnitude of differences in the response rates of external and internal control districts was statistically significant at the .95 level or better, 2) the statistical

significance level approached the .95 level, or, 3) the variables were of special interest to the researcher in terms of their effect on superintendent dominance. The variables entered into the series of regressions are listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2

EXTERNAL POLICY PREDICTORS

School Board Variables	Superintendent Variables
Education level	Levy defeats in last 3 years
Income of principal wage earner	Superintendent should stick to the letter-of-the-law
Board elected or appointed	Superintendent represents teachers to the board
Source of encouragement to run for school board	Disagreement over roles
Past political activity	Groups attempt to change fiscal policies
Disagreement over fiscal issues	Groups succeeded in changing desegregation/civil rights
Disagreement over school closings	Board and superintendent work to sell policies
Disagreement over desegregation	Citizen ratings of school quality
Disagreement over roles	Local power groups as information source
Hours spent with the superintendent	
Who initiates personal contacts	
Superintendent's responsiveness to the board	
Policy development leadership	
Orientation of board members	
Superintendent as information source	
Central office as information source	
Teacher organization as information source	
Employees as information source	
Media as information source	

TABLE 2
(CONTINUED)

School Board Variables (continued)	
Community criticism of board	
Groups attempting board influence	
Groups meeting with the board	
Groups critical of the superintendent	
Board role orientations	
Tension over fiscal issues	
Tension over bond issues	
Tension over firing teachers	
Tension over racial issues	
Board takes unpopular stands	
Discuss education with media	
Influence financial groups	
Influence the media	
Superintendent avoids unpopular changes	
Members of political groups	

Four variables were found to be the best indicators of superintendent dominance over external policy issues and six variables were identified as improving the likelihood that the school board would overcome such dominance by their chief executive.

Synopsis of variables contributing to superintendent dominance over external policy issues. Tension and conflict in the community, particularly over bond issues or tax levy defeats, increases the probability that the superintendent will dominate the decision process over external policy issues (first predictor

variable). The school board, subjected to persuasion attempts from diverse and conflicting interest groups, loses intraboard cohesion and fragments into factions. Zeigler and Jennings (1974) reached a similar conclusion (p. 175). Board members, feeling inadequate in the onslaught of conflictual pressures, turn to their chief executive for leadership and guidance. The community that cannot provide clear and unified preferences to the board over bond issues and tax levies unwittingly provides the greatest enhancement to the superintendent's proclivity to dominate.

Board members who perceive the superintendent as responsive to their preferences are most willing to permit the superintendent to dominate external policy decisions (second predictor variable). In a similar vein, when the chief executive is perceived as possessing and accurately reflecting the values and expectations of the board, the superintendent will dominate (third predictor variable). For the superintendent to remain predominant, there must also be congruence between the board and superintendent expectations in terms of appropriate and desirable role behaviors.

These findings speak to the compelling need for a trust relationship between the policy makers and their chief executives in school district governance. Board members need to know that the superintendent is responsive to their needs and operates within an acceptable zone of tolerance. When board members and their superintendent have compatible ideas and preferences regarding external policy issues, administrative discretionary license is increased.

The probability of external control is also enhanced when board members initiate a majority of the contacts between boards and superintendents (fourth predictor variable). That conclusion needs some explanation. The existence of a trust relationship creates an atmosphere wherein board members are comfortable in approaching the chief executive to share expectations, concerns, and suggestions. Such interaction suggests the anticipation by board members of desired outcomes. John Dewey spoke of such sharing as a communication process that, " ... modifies the disposition of both parties who partake in it." In the absence of such a relationship, board members would hesitate to initiate contacts with the superintendent.

The four predictor variables of superintendent control over external policy issues relate to shared preferences, congruent role expectations, and trust relationships in addition to board reliance on the superintendent's technical expertise resources in the face of community conflict, tension and factionalism. The pervasive message for school governance is that school boards permit wide discretionary powers for the superintendent as long as the chief executive operates within a zone that accurately reflects the values and expectations of the governing body and to the extent that the superintendent effectively mediates between various board factions on conflictual issues.

Synopsis of variables enabling school boards to resist dominance over external policy issues. The community - school board interaction is highly effective in terms of ameliorating the probability of superintendent dominance over external issues,

just as it is for control over internal policy issues. Frequent school board contacts with the media (first predictor variable) along with the ability of the media (second predictor variable) and local power elites (third predictor variable) to provide information and influence board decisions are the best predictors of successful resistance to superintendent control. The gatekeeping function has great saliency. When the media and community elites act as information gatekeepers and when the level of interaction with the school board is high, the political resources available reduce the probability that the superintendent will prevail.

The superintendent's control is reduced when community groups or individuals successfully bring about changes in school district policies dealing with civil rights issues and desegregation programs (fourth predictor variable). The notion appears to be that once the community has succeeded in changing policy decisions, in short-circuiting the organizational labyrinth, it is easier to repeat the process again. The superintendent's technical resources are of much less value in influencing external policies in such situations.

Superintendents who lack control over external policies are less positive and assertive over expectations for their own behavior. They perceive themselves as constrained and lacking in personal discretionary authority in administering the school enterprise. Instead, they see their jobs basically involve implementing board policy and sticking to the letter-of-the-law in enforcing board rules and policies (fifth predictor variable). In reality, the constraints may be self-imposed and the lack of

assertiveness in role behaviors assures the diminution of their influence and power resources.

Finally, the more frequently it is necessary for the board and the superintendent to work together in extra-ordinary ways to "sell" the community on board decisions and policies, the easier it is for the board to resist dominance by the superintendent (sixth predictor variable). When board decisions and policies go beyond the zone of tolerance within the community and are not harmonious with citizen preferences, the community is apt to exert persuasion attempts in an effort to neutralize the superintendent's influence.

In summary, the potential for the school board to overcome the power resources of the superintendent and to successfully resist superintendent dominance depends, in large part, on the interaction and relationship between the board and the community. The greater the influence wielded by community groups as sources of information for decision making, the lesser the probability of superintendent control. Information and influence efforts by community power elites and the media are particularly effective. However, when the community cannot develop a unified position and controversy and confusion cloak the values and expectations of the various constituencies, school boards factionalize and eventually turn to their chief executive for leadership and guidance. Under such norms, superintendents who are assertive and expect to use discretionary powers are eminently prepared to take charge of the decision-making process.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

Who governs? The evidence is clear! Superintendents and school boards share in the balance of power. Superintendents dominate in a majority of cases when decisions involve internal policy issues -- those matters generally seen as confined to the school system itself and where the technical expertise of the professional is greatest. School boards successfully resist superintendent dominance overwhelmingly when external policy issues are under consideration. These issues have immediately visible and tangible effects on the ecology of the entire community and public opinion carries at least as much weight, if not more so, than the technical expertise of the chief executive and the educational bureaucracy.

Although each school district and the internal machinations of each governance structure is unique, some conclusions can be developed that span the diversities. School boards permit their chief executive to dominate the educational governance partnership when a trust relationship has been established, when the board and superintendent have shared expectations as to role behaviors, and as long as the superintendent operates within a zone of tolerance that respects the values and expectations of the governors. The superintendent must be responsive to board suggestions and preferences and must avoid taking frequent stands that are unacceptable to the community. It is said there are two qualities needed to succeed as a superintendent: (1) to be able to step on the toes of those who need it without disturbing the shine of the shoes; (2) to be able to get money from the citizens without disturbing the taxpayers.

Conflict and factionalism within the community create decision dilemmas for the school board, destroy intra-board cohesion, and result in extensive bloc voting. The community conflict often reflects incompatible persuasion efforts from diverse special interest groups, organizations, or individuals. Consensual decision making is impossible. The superintendent is seen by the board as a technical expert and strategist who is able to develop a working solution. The board turns to the superintendent for advice and leadership and the likelihood for superintendent dominance is enhanced.

Community-derived influences and political activism are the means for neutralizing the superintendent's leadership ability and disrupting the smoothness of the board-superintendent partnership. When community groups exercise considerable control over information sources and persuasion attempts, they reduce the superintendent's effectiveness with the board. Local power elites, the media, and representatives of business and financial institutions are particularly adept at replacing the professional staff as influential sources of information for the school board. The superintendent's role becomes more functionary with limited discretionary powers and involves primarily the implementation of policy.

The political environment also impacts on the superintendent-board relationship. In the face of isolation from the governance process, the community sets about the process of reasserting itself. This reassertion is evidenced in spirited competition during school board campaigns, defeat of incumbent board members and eventual involuntary departure of the superintendent. As long as the representatives and their chief

executive do not challenge community mores and expectations they are unchallenged by the community-at-large. The superintendent exercises professional discretion and the initiatives of the superintendent are dominant.

The situational differences between superintendents who control internal policies and those who also prevail over external decisions are more quantitative than qualitative and are subtle in nature. Under norms of external control, superintendents are more responsive to the expectations of their boards, there is greater congruency between their role behavior expectations and those of their board members, and they operate within communities characterized by higher tension levels, especially over bond issues and tax levies.

Along a similar vein, the variables that impact on the ability of the board to resist dominance over external issues are quantitative in nature. Power elites and media representatives are more influential as sources of information and the professional staff is less influential. Community efforts at persuasion are more successful and the superintendent is typically less assertive at exercising personal discretion and is more accepting of the functionary role.

The discretionary authority of the chief executive appears to be that of a technical expert and skilled politician limited by situational variables and parameters imposed as a result of the type of issue or policy question being addressed.

Implications for the profession. The apolitical myth of educational governance has been thoroughly discredited and yet many chief executives fail to recognize the political aspect of

their role and do not understand school districts as open systems interacting with, and impacted by, the environment. The present study confirmed the political impact of community interaction with school governance and the correlation with superintendent dominance. Superintendents need to develop political acumen and expertise in interpersonal communications if they are to function effectively in a political milieu. That is our challenge for the decade of the '80s!

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